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SUBJECT: CHANCELLOR SEEKS TO RALLY TROOPS WITH ANNIVERSARY
SPEECH

¶1. (U) To respond to criticism from within the party that the Social Democrats (SPO) had let the People's Party dominate Grand Coalition policy during the government's first year, the SPO organized a New Year's rally for party leaders and activists on Jan. 15. After an unintentionally comic opening with a performance by two Cirque de Soleil-type strongmen (the MC compared their slow motion acrobatics to the government's performance), a 20-minute video set forth the social achievements of the government's first year and giving some coverage to all the SPO Ministers with the exception of Defense Minister Darabos.

¶2. (U) The centerpiece of the unexpectedly well-attended rally (many attendees were obliged to watch the rally on video screens from another room) was a 50-minute speech by Gusenbauer. Gusenbauer's workmanlike speech began with a long and rather philosophical discourse on Austria's responsibility to history. He emphasized that Austria could not "draw a line under" its Nazi-era past, but he also addressed older themes -- the emergence of Austria as a state after WWI and Austria's place during the Cold War.

¶3. (U) The core of the speech was Gusenbauer's description of a series of more-or-less concrete policy proposals for the coming year -- he emphasized the need for distributive justice during good economic times, which required tax reform. Other key themes included care for the elderly, additional investment in education and research, and the need to preserve Austrian economic competitiveness. Gusenbauer mentioned foreign policy only briefly, affirming that Austria will continue to respond to humanitarian crises, poverty, and war. In that context he endorsed the EU Chad mission. He also called for a common European immigration and asylum policy. In a speech marked by frequent but not overly enthusiastic applause, Gusenbauer's best received remarks were his denunciation of a vicious attack on Islam by a local politician in Graz on the previous weekend.

¶4. (U) OVP General Secretary Hannes Missesthor told reporters afterwards that SPO ministers were responsible for 50 of the 80 achievements cited in an SPO brochure on the speech. (Note: Missesthor did not remind reporters that nearly all had been introduced into law or policy and funded by the previous government.)

¶5. (U) Comment. Gusenbauer's speech was workmanlike, but not inspiring. To judge by the crowd of demonstrators from the youth wing of the SPO outside the event venue, it will probably not go far toward silencing his critics within the party. Gusenbauer avoided any criticism of the People's Party, a tactic which might have won him some favor among his critics. However, as parliamentary caucus leader Josef Cap and party think tank Director Karl Duffek told Emboffs afterwards, the Chancellor had to stay above partisan politics. Attacks on the SPO's partner in government were their job. End Comment.

